

News Release

Memorial tree planting at the U of M Crookston on Friday, October 21, 2011, to commemorate Wangari Maathai, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate and sustainable development activist; Event begins at 4 p.m. in the Nature Nook

By Itollefs on Tuesday, October 18, 2011

A legend has passed. On September 25, 2011, Wangari Maathai, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate and sustainable development activist died in Nairobi, Kenya, after a prolonged battle with cancer. In her memory and as a tribute to her legacy, the University of Minnesota, Crookston will plant a memorial apple tree on campus. In coordination with the hosting of the Mid-America Collegiate Horticultural Society (MACHS) conference, a Honeycrisp apple tree will be planted at 4 p.m. on Friday, October 21, 2011, in the Nature Nook, near the west entrance to Bergland Laboratory on the campus. The public is invited to attend.

The family of Maathai and the Green Belt Movement asks well-wishers to plant a tree to provide a living symbol of Wangari and her tireless work to make the world a better and more peaceful place. U of M, Crookston Chancellor Charles H. Casey will make comments during the tree planting along with Harouna Maiga, Ph.D., associate professor of animal science and a native of Mali, Africa.

The recipient of numerous awards commemorating her activities with sustainability, international conservation, women's rights, health, Maathai is perhaps best known for founding the Green Belt Movement in 1977. The movement was launched in Kenya primarily to inspire women to improve their livelihoods by planting trees for firewood, clean water, and soil protection. It has become a world-wide movement, particularly in third-world countries.

Dan Svedarsky, director of the Center for Sustainability had the pleasure of meeting Maathai at the U.N. Conference on Global Climate Change held in Copenhagen in December of 2009. "A group of us met with her at the Danish Film Institute to view the premier showing of, 'Taking Root,' a film featuring her life story. That film and discussions with her which followed, were an incredibly moving experience," according to Svedarsky.



Background

Wangari Maathai was born in Nyeri, Kenya (Africa) in 1940. The first woman in East and Central Africa to earn a doctorate degree, Professor Maathai obtained a degree in Biological Sciences from Mount St. Scholastica College in Atchison, Kansas (1964).(Her studies in American were supported by a Kennedy Foundation scholarship for Kenyans which also included President Obama's father.) She subsequently earned a Master of Science degree from the University of Pittsburgh (1966). Professor Maathai pursued doctoral studies in Germany and later obtained a Ph.D. (1971) from the University of Nairobi where she also taught veterinary anatomy. She became chair of the Department of Veterinary Anatomy in 1976.

Professor Maathai is internationally recognized for her persistent struggle for democracy, human rights and environmental conservation. She has addressed the UN on several occasions and spoke on behalf of women at special sessions of the General Assembly during the five-year review of the Earth Summit. She and the Green Belt Movement have received numerous awards, most notably the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize. In 2005, Professor Maathai was honored by Time Magazine as one of the 100 most influential people in the world, and by Forbes Magazine as one of 100 most powerful women in the world.

Apple experts at the University of Minnesota were responsible for the development of the Honeycrisp apple making it an apt tribute to Maathai on the Crookston campus. The event is sponsored by the Crookston Students for Sustainable Development (CSSD) and the Center for Sustainability. It commences an initiative to develop an "Edible Campus Landscape" where fruit-producing trees and shrubs will be planted along with possibly campus gardening. "Wangari would have liked that," according to Svedarsky.

To learn more, visit www.greenbeltmovement.org.

Today the University of Minnesota, Crookston delivers 26 bachelor's degree programs, 18 minors, and 36 concentrations, including 10 online degrees, in the areas of agriculture and natural resources; business; liberal arts and education; and math, science and technology. With an enrollment of 1,600 undergraduates from 25 countries and 40 states, the Crookston campus offers a supportive, close-knit atmosphere that leads to a prestigious University of Minnesota degree. "Small Campus. Big Degree." To learn more, visit www.umcrookston.edu.

In the photo: Wangari Maathai, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate and sustainable development activist, from www.greenbeltmovement.org.

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